

Fostering Innovations

Fostering Innovations Limited

The Atrium, 1 Harefield Road, Uxbridge, London UB8 1EX

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This is a privately owned independent fostering agency based in London. The majority of its foster carers are based in London, while a small number are based in the Midlands. The agency provides foster care placements for short- and long-term respite, foster care placements for asylum-seeking children, unaccompanied minors, children with complex health needs, sibling groups and parents with children.

At the time of this inspection, the fostering service had 57 approved fostering households and 103 children placed with its foster carers. The independent fostering agency registered in July 2016. The registered manager and responsible individual registered with Ofsted at this time.

Inspection dates: 24 to 28 October 2022

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 12 November 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The fostering service provides good-quality care. Outcomes for children are positive and children have good experiences. They develop secure attachments with their foster families and have a very strong sense of belonging. One child told the inspector, 'I love my family and they love me. Everything here is good.' Children identify adults who they trust to share any worries that they may have. Children feel loved and listened to. Unplanned endings are rare.

Children receive individualised care that meets their needs. The agency's matching process is robust and ensures that support plans are in line with the placing authority's care plans. Where unmet needs are identified, staff ensure that additional support and resources are provided to help bridge any gaps.

Children receive care that meets their identity needs. This is particularly the case for issues of culture, ethnicity, language, and religion. However, the current pool of foster carers is not ethnically diverse. Issues of sexual identity is not prominent in the agency's key documents, policies and training. This does not demonstrate that the fostering agency can meet children's diverse needs.

Children live healthy lifestyles. Foster carers and staff ensure that there is good promotion of children's physical, emotional and social well-being. The agency's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been effective. This helped to keep children and their families safe and well. Children have good access to primary healthcare services, and they receive advice and support from specialist services as required. This is particularly the case for children who have complex medical needs. The agency's psychologist typically helps staff and foster carers to explore issues of trauma, behaviour and mental health support needs.

Children's learning outcomes are positive. They attend school and college regularly, and most are making steady progress. Staff and foster carers consistently liaise with education professionals to promote children's learning. The agency's education mentor supports foster carers to encourage children's educational achievement. Older children receive support to develop practical living skills. This helps to prepare them for adulthood.

Children engage in a wide range of physical, social and religious activities of their choosing. Typically, these include sports clubs, such as football and cricket, youth clubs, and attendance at places of worship. Children also enjoy participating in family events, holidays and celebrations with their foster families. Entire families benefit from social events arranged by staff of the fostering agency.

Children spend time with their brothers and sisters, family members and others when it is safe for them to do so. The fostering agency manages arrangements for family time carefully. The service ensures that there is a consistent focus on

children's best interests. Where children do not wish to meet with family members, their wishes are respected.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: good

Foster carers and staff work hard to protect children from harm and abuse. They ensure that the safety and well-being of children are paramount. Children say that they feel safe with their foster families. Children are not involved in high risk-taking behaviour, such as substance misuse and child sexual and criminal exploitation.

Children have good opportunities to speak with staff in private when they complete home visits. Staff routinely complete unannounced visits to foster carers' homes. This promotes the safety of children. Children benefit from the fostering service's comprehensive child protection policies and procedures. This strongly features in staff and foster carers' training and supervision.

Safe care policies offer foster carers good guidance about how to keep children safe on a day-to-day basis. However, safe care policies do not include guidance to foster carers about adult parents living with them in parent and child placements.

Staff's recording of risk assessment requires improvement. Not all risk assessments are kept up to date, and some do not reflect children's known historical risks. This does not ensure that staff and foster carers have information that may help them to anticipate and explore children's risk-taking behaviour. Risk assessments do not highlight risks posed by adults in parent and child placements.

Foster carers set clear and consistent boundaries for children, and this promotes children's positive behaviour. Foster carers use effective strategies to help to manage children's sometimes complex behaviour and to promote appropriate behaviour. They do not restrain children. An independent reviewing officer said to a child with complex needs, 'Your carers know how to help you calm down when you seem to become over-stimulated. It seems that you are slowly entering the world that we all share, and this is an exciting time for all those who love you.'

Foster carers and staff speak with children about the risks posed when they are missing from care. Risk assessments offer foster carers guidance about managing children's absences from their home if children do not have permission to be away. Foster carers take effective action and there is good communication between foster carers, staff, the police, and local authority social workers. This helps to promote children's safe return when they are missing from care.

Investigations into allegations are prompt and appropriate. Managers ensure that their communication with safeguarding professionals, such as local authority designated officers and the police, is regular and effective. However, not all safeguarding notifications are promptly reported to Ofsted as required.

The recruitment, assessment and preparation of foster carers has a strong focus on child protection. Managers ensure the safe vetting and recruitment of staff, foster

carers, and panel members. This confirms that individuals working for the fostering agency are suitable to work with children.

Foster carers' homes are safe and secure. They provide children with a comfortable and nurturing environment.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers are ambitious and strive for the continual improvement of the fostering service and children's outcomes. The responsible individual and registered manager are both very experienced and qualified to manage the fostering service.

Managers' oversight and monitoring of the service's records are not strong. There are gaps in managers' review of key documents. As a result, the quality of some records require improvement. These include risk assessments, safe care policies, some unannounced visit records, and some foster carers' logs. Foster care agreements do not include the terms of foster carers' approval as required by the regulations.

Managers have successfully addressed weaknesses highlighted at the service's previous Ofsted inspection.

Children settle well into their new foster homes, and managers take effective action if this is not the case. They appropriately challenge other professionals if they are thought not to be acting in the best interest of children. Managers demonstrate the positive impact that the fostering service is having on children's lives.

The support and supervision of foster carers are excellent. A foster carer said, 'Managers and staff are always there, twenty-four seven. I don't feel like just a number; they know who I am. They know my family and they know what I can do.' Other foster carers spoke about feeling understood, well appreciated and supported by a visible management team.

The training of foster carers is generally good. However, not all foster carers have completed the training support and development standard within the 12-month time frame. The agency's specialist training to one set of foster carers providing parent and child placements is yet to take place. This is despite a parent and child already being in placement with the foster family. In this case, managers were reliant on specialist training that had been provided to the foster carers previously.

The fostering panel promotes safe, secure and stable placements. Panel meetings are organised and panel discussions and recommendations are well considered and thorough. Panel members have the necessary knowledge and expertise. However, managers are yet to appoint a panel member who was previously a looked after child (LAC) or a representative from the health profession.

Staff complete foster carer assessments that are of a high standard. The annual reviewing process is thorough. This promotes the regular review of foster carers' suitability to continue to care for children.

Staff work collaboratively to provide consistency and stability to children. Managers provide staff with very good support and supervision. Individual staff supervision is frequent and meaningful. Staff participate in peer and practice meetings, and they have consultation meetings with the agency's psychologist for clinical advice. Staff induction, development and training opportunities are good. Managers conduct staff appraisals each year.

Children benefit from the close partnership working between their foster carers, staff of the fostering service and other professionals. Communication between the parties is consistent and effective. This supports the coordination of children's care, and children's positive experiences and progress.

A local authority independent reviewing officer said in a child's LAC review, 'It was the first time that you acknowledged me and it felt like a special moment. Watching you at home again gave me a sense of reassurance as I could see your progress.'

What does the independent fostering agency need to do to improve?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>If any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table. (Regulation 36 (1))</p>	<p>30 November 2022</p>
<p>If a fostering service provider decide to approve foster parent X they must—</p> <p>enter into a written agreement with X covering the matters specified in Schedule 5 (the "foster care agreement"). (Regulation 27 (5)(b))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that foster care agreements specify the terms of foster carers' approval.</p>	<p>1 January 2023</p>
<p>The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. (Regulation 17 (1))</p> <p>This relates to the training of foster carers who provide parent and child placements. The fostering service provider must also provide all foster carers with information and advice relating to children's sexual identity.</p>	<p>1 January 2023</p>

Recommendations

- The registered person should implement an effective strategy to ensure sufficient foster carers to be responsive to current and predicted future demands on the service. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 13.1)
- The registered person should ensure that the skills, knowledge and experience of persons on the central list are sufficient to enable the fostering service to

constitute panels that are equipped to make competent recommendations to the fostering service provider, taking into account the nature of the children and carers that the service caters for. In particular, that the fostering service recruit a panel member who has expertise in health and a panel member who was formerly a child in care. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 14.8)

- The registered person should ensure that staff, volunteers, panel members and fostering households understand the nature of records maintained and follow the service's policy for the keeping and retention of files. There is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record-keeping and take action when needed. This relates to risk assessments, safe care policies, unannounced visits and foster carers' logs. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 26.2).
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers are able to evidence that the Training, Support and Development Standards have been attained within 12 months of approval. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 20.3)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people using the 'Social care common inspection framework'. This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards.

Independent fostering agency details

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Inspector

Sandra Jacobs-Walls, Social Care Inspector

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